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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003423

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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS IMPROVEMENTS IN INTERIOR AND DEFENSE
MINISTRIES

REF: BAGHDAD 2368

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Steve Walker for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Due to recent changes in their organizational structures, the Human Rights Offices in the Ministries of Defense (MoD) and Interior (MoI) now face fewer restrictions in pursuing their human rights agendas. The Human Rights Directorate in the MoD was placed under the ministry's Secretary General on July 29. The Human Rights Office in the MoI was made an independent directorate with direct access to Minister Bulani on October 16. In recent meetings, both directors noted significant improvements in their ability to conduct inspections and investigations and in their access to their respective ministers. As a result, they have been able to pursue allegations of wrong-doing and correct problems within the ministries. End Summary.

MOD: INCREASED INSPECTIONS

12. (C) Iman Naji Taha, the head of the Human Rights Directorate in the Ministry of Defense (MoD), told PolOff on October 15 that she now faces fewer restrictions in her work following the move of her office from the Inspector General's (IG) office to the General Counsel's office and finally to the Secretary General's office on July 29. Under the IG, the office was not able to visit MoD facilities. The General Counsel reduced the office's staff from 18 to four and blocked access to logistical support. The initial move from the IG's office was based on a recommendation from Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Salim to make the human rights offices more independent. However, personality issues between Iman and the General Counsel resulted in further negative changes for the office. After further pressure from Minister Wijdan and the USG, the office was removed from the General Counsel's office and placed under the Secretary General by decision of Minister Abdul Qadir. Iman says she has more freedom in conducting inspections of detention facilities, can more easily submit reports to the minister, and has regained the 14 staff members that had been transferred.

13. (C) With the change in control of the directorate, the human rights teams no longer need advance notice to inspect MoD detention facilities. The office now has a schedule for visits and tries to inspect two to three facilities per month, often with the support of the USG MNSTC-I advisory teams to the MoD. According to Iman, the major problems in the facilities are overcrowding and the related problems of a lack of food and medicine and unsanitary living conditions. The office is working to increase judicial processing and is pushing for the execution of judicial release orders, which she noted to be a problem around the country.

14. (C) A recent success was at the Harithiya detention facility where family visits had been blocked. After continued pressure from the office, the facility allowed the first family visits in three years on October 12. The facility also finally agreed to send detainee files to the

amnesty courts. Iman recently visited the Diyala Iraqi Army/Iraqi General Forces Command detention facility and successfully pressured the authorities to release 31 detainees who had release orders but had not been released. She noted that 99 percent of the detainees in that facility were Sunnis who had been arrested in mass sweeps during recent operations.

MOI: GREATER INDEPENDENCE

15. (C) Director General of the Human Rights Directorate in the Minister of Interior (MoI) Neamah Hashim, along with two colleagues, told PolOff on October 16 that the directorate had been successful in its efforts to become an independent body in the MoI. The directorate has also been granted direct access to the minister, Juwad Bulani. As a result, the teams no longer need prior approval to visit detention facilities and can send their reports directly to the minister (these problems discussed reftel). Neamah said the teams are conducting more visits than previously and often do inspections at MoI detention facilities with MNF-I.

16. (C) Along with the Internal Affairs and Inspector General offices, the Human Rights Directorate conducts its own investigations into allegations of human rights abuses at the MoI. Neamah noted that his office is currently conducting six investigations, three involving suspects from the National Police and three from the MoI Wolf Brigade. Four cases involve allegations of detainee torture, two of which allegedly occurred at the headquarters of the Wolf

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Brigade and one at the Second Division National Police facility. One case involves two missing detainees, and the other is for conspiring to kidnap a detainee. All cases are still under investigation with results pending.

COMMENT

17. (C) We will continue supporting the work of the human rights offices by facilitating visits, providing advice, and including the teams in national human rights projects and training programs. The Embassy and MNF-I are coordinating inspections of GOI detention facilities and integrating GOI officials, including human rights officers, into those inspections. These developments are a positive sign that the ministries are placing more emphasis on human rights issues, particularly in improving their detention facilities. We will continue to monitor the investigations of the six cases. The MoI is also investigating other cases of abuse or misconduct through its Internal Affairs and Inspector General offices as well as through its internal court.
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